Interview with Miss D.

W14780

[???]

[CLINTON AVENUE SURVEY. FIRST BLOCK?]

[INTERVIEW WITH MISS. D.

[??]

P. K. [RUSSO?]

Miss. D. is a spinster, third generation Scotch, seventy-two years old, who lives alone in a single house on the upper end of the block. It is the only single house left on that side of the street, and stands back from the sidewalk with a fair sized lawn in front, and a large yard in the rear; none to the other houses has so much space around it. When we first covered the street, we were under the impression that the house was empty. The windows were completely shuttered, and there was no indication that the house was occupied. We did, however, knock at the back door. It was opened a crack, after someone within unbarred, unlocked first one door and then a second storm door. A bright eyed, white haired, old lady peered out at us. We shouted through the storm door, and finally she opened the door to us. After we had explained, she asked us to return the following day [about?] then thirty in the morning. She smiled, “I've worked hard all my life, and now I'm taking, it easy. I don't get up before ten o'clock.” [C. B. Conn.?]

Miss D. remembered very little about here early experiences. She told us her father had built the house the year after the great blizzard — fifty years ago. “[There?] were only three houses on the street then; [there?] were big open lots all around, and the Sound used

to come almost up to [?] The boys used to jump from one bog to another. The railroad was on the street level then, and the big garage on State Street was a stable. I [was?] born at [Warehouse?] Point, twelve miles from Hartford. My father was a [?] and Oil Stove merchant. I can tell you all about oil stoves — and you'd be surprised to know that I can tell you how to manufacture in and all about tobacco. That's what everybody did around there. I came to [Bridgeport?] when I was nineteen — with the sister of our Methodist minister, who asked me if I wanted to come down to Bridgeport and work in a corset factory. I said, “[Sure?], I'll go', I was willing to take a chance. Then my sister [?] down — I really broke up our home; later on the whole family came down. Before my family came I boarded out with a private family on Lafayette [?]

2

My first job was in the Thompson-[Langdon?] Corset factory. I did nice work glove fitting. I worked from seven in the morning till six at night, with an hour off for lunch. We used to ge up before six and walk about a mile to work, and then walk back at night. It was faster than waiting for the horse cars — they used to make a circuit of the city. During the Cleveland administration, they were slack in the factory; I worked part time and made ten to twelve dollars a week. Then I went to work at the Star Shirt factory, as a buttonhole operator. My sister [Mae?] worked there too, but she went to [arner's later?]. I was a good worker and they sent for me, too, but I never [orked?] there. I worked the same hours at the [?], and when we had to work only until five o'clock on Saturdays we thought it was wonderful. We [got?] an hour off. Then the [union?] came in. (Miss D. could not remember any details as to the [union?] or the [demands?]) I joined it — I didn't want them to think I was deriving the benefits without paying in my share. The workers went out on strike and I went too. The company moved to Baltimore, Maryland — some of the workers went down with the company — I would have gone too if I didn't have my mother to look after. The company didn't want to be [dictated?] to — and you cant blame them in a way. If you had twenty-five thousand sand dollars you wouldn't want anyone to tell you what to do. I made big pay at the Star.

“Then I went to work at the Bryant Electric, where I made sockets, assembled chains, put chains in the sockets,” she pointed to the electric light with a wooden yardstick which she held in her hand during the entire interview. “There were mostly foreigners at the Bryant — Hungarian and [?] people — and a lot of women. They were fast workers — and strong. Very nice, very nice. There was a strike in Bryant's too. I dont remember much about that, but I went to [?] while the strike was on, and then came back when it was over. Let's see — I remember, the superintendent thumbed un in when we came back,” she jerked her thumb over her shoulder, and laughed. “I always say I was in two labor fights, and two church fights. I used to ? 3 belong to the first Presbyterian Church on Myrtle Avenue and State Street. Some of the members wanted to discharge the minister, and the other members didn't want him to go. So we walked out and started a church of our own. I paid what I [signed?] for though before I left, and let it go at that. I didn't care too much, [We?] called it the People's Presbyterian Church, but now its called the Westminister Presbyterian Church. Then they had a pow-wow there. It was about the minister, and I said to my sister, [Mae?], you can stay here if you want to, but I'm getting out’, and I haven't been there since. I have nothing against either church, and no one has anything against me, I guess. I always paid up. We can't all think alike, but when the Church can't agree,what can you think about other people.

“We used to have a good time then — there were a lot more concerts, and I used to go to the Opera down on Main Street. We used to take the boat twice a month down to New York — the [Crystal?] Wave and the Rosedale — they were lovely boats. It was a nice little sail in the summertime. We'd be working and someone would say, ‘Let's go to New York,’ and off we'd go. [?] friends where I worked, and in the Church, but I didn't [have any?] friends in Bryants. I don't know why — they were all nice people. I stopped working when my mother died — I took care of the house. My sister was bed-ridden for years before she died five years ago. I've been living alone since then. I used to [go?] to the movies down town at Poli's with a friend of mine, but since she died, I go to the movies out here now. It came to quite a bit, you know, with fares and all. Yes, I like the movies, don't you? I go

every Wednesday and Saturday — afternoons you know. I'd be afraid to come back to the house alone at night. I guess I like any kind of movies — especially since the talkies came. The first movies I saw, the men and women were about so high," she measured off about eight inches on her yardstick. "I didn't go so much then as I do now. I'm a great novel-reader too, you know. I go to the library and get about four books a week. My friends gives me enough magazines to last me over the winter — I'll have to start going to the library now that it is warmer. I like Joseph [?] 4 don't you? [?] just finished reading 'Gone With The Wind' — I wasn't stuck on it. [So othin?] in it reminded me of something that happened to me when I was a girl — guess that's why I sort of liked it. I listen to the radio — I [?] all the [??] - and on Sundays I listen to the phil-harmonic. [??] every day and [?] my paper, then I check off the programs I want to hear and I pin the programs on the wall over the radio. I don't see why they stopped listing [?] — they had a lot of good programs. Then I do get out and visit with friends sometimes. I listen to the news broadcasts too. Oh, I think it's awful. I can't imagine what is happening, In a way, its because we let the children have too much — the children do just as they have a mind too - there's no getting away from it, don't you think so? I mean stealing — and all that. Children how have those movies, and the pictures in the paper. It's a wonder they don't have some awful disease — they're always pulling things out of the rubbish. Why my back yard is a mess — and I don't dare say anything to them. You know, I live alone, you can't tell what they'd do. The children break the windows — I had to board up the cellar last year. That's why I keep the shutters closed. [???] say booh. They throw garbage in [my?] yard and old papers. The city [???] [somethin?] about it. Four years ago when we had the blizzard, a little boy crawled over the snow and peeked in here, through the shutters. No getting away [?] it, he was so cute. The children wouldn't harm me, but sometimes they frighten me. I go to bed at nine. Sometimes I sit up till twelve and listen to special broadcasts. Oh, I get England and [France?] and Germany, too. I got music from Berlin, the other night. It's awful, what's happening. Hitler shouldn't have [done?] what he did. The poor [laiser?]. I bet the poor [?] people wish they had him back more than once since Hitler got in. I read the other day where a man had a fortune left to him in Italy but he won't go there to get it. You can't

blame him. [ver?] since the world began there have been wars and rumors of war. I hope the war won't come here. The World War was terrible. They roped us in. I think Hoover went too far. That war bread was terrible. It made me sick. I don't listen to the President 5 much on the radio. I'm not interested in those things so much. It works you up and makes you mad. Well, you have to grin and bear it. You know when I worked in Bryants, a Jewish woman worked along side of me. I liked her a lot, she was awfully nice. She used to called me her Sarah. When I used to tell her we'd have to grin and bear it, she'd come back and say, ‘grimmed and bury it’. That was funny. Up where I used to live — in Warehouse Point — they were all genuine Americans — Yankees, they call them. There were two Scotch families, and one German; that's all the foreigners they had. I wouldn't know the place now. I heard an Englishman speak at the United Church Forum. I couldn't understand a word he said. I always say, ‘ Yankees, they have a twang, the Irish, they have a brogue, the Scotch have a burr, but what has the Englishman got?’.

“Last year I took a trip with my niece — we went out to California and Arizona. It was lovely; we traveled by pullman. I like to travel. I've been up to Boston, have you? But [give?] me New York City. I don't expect to live forever, so I like to enjoy myself when I can.”

Miss D. showed us through the house. It was immaculate. There were seven rooms with bath. No furnace had been installed by Miss D's. father as the family was undecided about staying. Miss D. heats the house with a Coal kitchen range; she lights the fire anew every morning. The house was furnished with stiff old furniture of the 1900's — very well cared for. There were two organs, one in the living room and one in the dining room; Miss D. used to play them. She told us she didn't like the piano because it sounded ‘like old tin pans’. Miss D. used only three rooms for living quarters; the rest were shut off. Miss.D. does all the cleaning and cooking for herself. When we left she told us that she had enjoyed our visit very much and asked us to call in again to see her. She told us she liked to chat and didn't have much company. The grocer next door told us that Miss D.

purchases all her groceries there now; when her sister was alive she insisted that the shopping be done on State Street. He told us she was very nice and a good friend of his.

6

[He?] implied that she had money. With large gestures he told us that she ‘gets into the taxi-cab, goes to the library, gets a lot of books, and then comes [home?] again in her taxi. Every week. She buys her coal in August, fills up her cellar, and buys a hundred bags of charcoal.’